

646 Secretariat or the Legislative Council. The agenda consists of
648 items suggested by the African members and by the Administration.
The African members of the Council elect four of their number as
[646] their nominees to the African Representative Council of Northern
Rhodesia, which in its turn advises the Governor on the appointment
of the African members of Legislative Council. As yet, the
Provincial Council meetings attract little attention among the bulk
of the African population, and few Ngoni know who their members
are. Nevertheless among the chiefs and councillors these meetings,
if regarded with suspicion, are of some interest, and for the two
delegates they provide an opportunity for stressing in public what
they regard as the Ngoni point of view as contrasted with those of
other tribes. Many of the Ngoni speeches are phrased in anachro-
nistic terms, and represent more an affirmation of how different
[537] the Ngoni are or used to be rather than a realisation of how similar
[196] their interests now are to those of their neighbours. However, it
is possible as the Council acquires more power and the consequences
of its deliberations begin to affect more people directly, Ngoni will
take a greater interest in its proceedings.²² The same comments
apply to Ngoni participation on the Provincial Team, an advisory
body with representatives from the Administration, the unofficial
White community, Indians and Africans.

648 Ngoniland is almost completely surrounded by Cewa chief-
doms. The old no-man's-land which isolated the Ngoni from their
neighbours in pre-conquest times has long ago disappeared. On
the fringes of Ngoni country there is a great deal of contact between
Ngoni villages and their Cewa neighbours and the links of kinship
stretch across tribal boundaries without interruption. Within
Ngoniland itself, under the control of county chiefs, are some
563 villages which still speak the Cewa language rather than the Nsenga
649 dialect used by most Ngoni. Most of these Cewa-speaking villages
[167] have come into Ngoniland after 1898. Their numbers are indicated
in Table VII (p. 133) where it will be seen that on the average
about one village in five has entered in this way. The great majority
of these are Cewa in origin. Some of them claim that they have
returned to ancestral sites, others state that they came as a result of
land alienation or of some quarrel with their former chief. Others
have been formed by non-Ngoni immigrants who have worked for
many years in the township or on the farms and built up their own
followings. In Northern Rhodesia villages of this kind form an
integral part of Ngoni society. The cultural features which distin-

²² cf. Barnes, 'History', for a discussion of the way in which Ngoni members
act at council meetings.

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fresh detachment came into the village from another part of the country. 535
The corpse was finally carried in a cow-skin from the hut to the grave 284
between a double line of warriors singing *ligabo* songs and thundering
with their shields knocking against their knees.

The only relic, therefore, of the military tradition which could be 178
observed in the Ngoni kingdoms in the 1930's were related either to the
national gatherings at the Paramount's village, or to the mourning ritual
for the royal line. The knowledge of the songs and the war-dresses was
preserved by the senior leading men and women of the trans-Zambesi
clans. The songs which follow were sung, except for the last one, in both 533
Ngoni kingdoms, and not only when *ligabo* dances took place. Some
were sung at marriage ceremonies, and some formerly as *amando* songs
at the pre-marriage rite for girls. In northern Ngoniland the last two
songs were sung in the churches, and tunes of other well-known war
songs were used in the churches of the Scottish mission with different
words written for them. Most of the songs when translated sound very
brief. They were less brief when sung in the Ngoni language since there
was repetition of certain lines, with repeated refrains, and with a series
of 'sounds' such as *heyo ho, si, ye ye* which accompanied the stamping
of feet and the clash of shields. These untranslatable 'sounds' were
sometimes the only part of the song which was known by the younger
men who had never used the Ngoni language, and they chanted them in
the right places as a chorus.

The first four songs were all intended to encourage the warriors at the 537
time of mobilization before going out on a campaign. They reminded
the singers that in the use of the short stabbing spear the Ngoni armies
were stronger than their enemies; that they brought their fighting skill
from the south-east; that, though the fight might be long, rest would
come in the evening; and that the army belonged to the Paramount, the
head of the kingdom. The fifth song suggested the kind of warning given
to warriors by the old men—that they should not give in after a fight,
but pursue the enemy and capture their cattle. The sixth song, though
the reference to Longiyeka was obscure, was said to be a warning against
treachery and revolt in the army. The seventh song had three themes:
that death was the lot of every man, and the earth where the grave would
be dug was never satisfied (*akumama* means 'to be satisfied'); that no one
would escape the universal fate of death, from the senior men wearing
the head-plumes to the common people and the cattle; and that the
ancestors already buried in the land would be joined by those then
alive. The terms used in this song to describe the social groups
among the Ngoni people were those which will occur throughout this
book.

1. No Paramount can be poor because of the spear.
Then why are you running away?

● 537

2. Do you hear?

The Ngoni come from the south-east.

3. What are we contending for?

In this way in the sky
The sun is setting.

4. O alas! the Paramount!

We fight for our Paramount only that.

5. The cattle run away, you cowards.

Those yonder; they run, you cowards.
The cattle, see, do they run? They run, you cowards.
Is your young manhood over? They run.
You are left with the carriers. They run.
Look at the cattle, they run, they run;
You have eyes only for the food-stuffs. They run.

6. They are talking, they are talking

Throughout the land.
Listen, keep silent, be still.
They are talking.
It will be spoken, it will be spoken
Throughout the land.
Longiyeka, you keep silent, you be still.
People are being talked about.

7. The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of those who wear the head-plumes.

We shall die on the earth.
The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of those who die as heroes.
Shall we all die on the earth?
Listen, O earth! We shall mourn because of you.
Listen, O earth! Shall we all die on the earth?

The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of the chiefs.

Shall we die on the earth?

The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of the women chiefs.

Shall we die on the earth?

Listen, O earth! We shall mourn because of you.

Listen, O earth! Shall we all die on the earth?

The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of nobles.

Shall we die on the earth?

The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of the royal women.

Shall we die on the earth?

Listen, O earth! We shall mourn because of you.

Listen, O earth! Shall we all die on the earth?

THE PARAMOUNT

47

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537

The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of the common people.

Shall we die on the earth?

The earth does not get fat. It makes an end of all beasts.

Shall we die on the earth?

Listen, you who are asleep, who are left tightly closed in the land!

Shall we all sink into the earth?

Listen, O earth! The sun is setting tightly.

We shall all enter into the earth.

CHAPTER II

THE PARAMOUNT

Introduction

THE Cewa term for chief (*mfumu*) was widely used in Nyasaland for chiefs of all ranks, as well as for village headmen and, occasionally, as an honorific form of address to an important individual. Among the Cewa a man could 'become a chief' by acquiring, through marriage or purchase, the right to own a site, known as a *masinda*, on which female initiation rites were carried out. This concept of the office of chieftainship among the Cewa and other local tribes was in sharp contrast to the centralized and unified concept inherent in the Ngoni term *inkosi*. I have translated *inkosi* here as Paramount because the term Paramount Chief was adopted by the Administration to denote a ruler who had recognized subordinate chiefs under him and whose court was an appeal court for their courts. It is necessary to emphasize here how distinctive the office of Paramount was among the various types of chiefs in Nyasaland, both in official recognition, and still more in the Ngoni ideas about their Paramount. We saw in Chapter II of Part I that no Nyasaland chiefs, except the Ngoni Paramounts, had Subordinate Native Authorities under them.

When the Ngoni left the south, a number of small chiefdoms there were gradually being overcome by Shaka and, based on his armies, he had set up a new and unique type of *inkosi*. The leaders of military bands who left him—Mzilikazi, Sothangane, Zwangendaba and Ngwana—had little recognition before they left, except as military and clan leaders. Yet after the Ngoni left, Zwangendaba and Ngwana received from their followers recognition of their political leadership as *inkosi*, and this was expressed by giving to the Paramount the salute of *Bayete*. Throughout their recitals of traditions and in their accounts of their political system, Ngoni informants in both kingdoms emphasized that for each kingdom there was one *inkosi* to whom alone the *Bayete* was given. We assume, therefore, that the later Ngoni concept of the Paramount and his

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schools, in sermons by Ngoni ministers in the churches. 814
 Fathers gathered their children together, boys and girls, on such occasions, and said to them: 'Listen. Do you hear? This is about our people from the beginning. Remember well. Do not forget, for the Ngoni cannot forget their past.'

A young man of about twenty related to me how his father, the head of a leading clan, used to talk to him about the Ngoni past when they went on hunting trips together on Mount Choma, where Paramount Mbelwa and his Ngoni had first settled in Northern Nyasaland. In among the dry grass the father showed the boy the sites of former villages, the polished floors and the sturdy door-posts of the huts, and the stumps of the kraal fences. He heard in that historical setting the story of one of the famous secessions from the main Ngoni kingdom. 'Early one morning,' said his father, 'we woke up, we who remained, and we saw that Ciwere had gone. All the people shouted "Ciwere has separated from us. He has separated indeed. Our Paramount is poor because of his departure."' [224] [172]

It was largely through their own efforts that the Ngoni succeeded in teaching their history to their children in the schools. More than one Ngoni leader who had been educated by the Scottish Mission began writing the history of his own people, and in their villages I found several young men recording in writing the traditions as told them by their grandfathers. One Ngoni minister, Rev. Y. M. Cibambo, for twenty years systematically recorded and checked and compared these traditions. His books in the local vernacular were used as readers in the mission schools, and later translated into English as *My Ngoni of Nyasaland*. 814 871

Sermons in church by Ngoni ministers not only referred to historical events which were illustrated in songs or recorded in oral traditions but to the role of the famous diviners, called prophets, 'dreamers of the head', who foretold the advent and manner of arrival of the Europeans. The Ngoni Christian leaders went further than this. They used the

643 wait for six or seven years before the procrastinating headmen
 [645] could lay aside jealousies, and actually place him in the authority of
 his father. Then when he is crowned he cannot sit in judgment
 [697] or give a decision unless his councillors have been summoned,
 and have deliberated with him. Many a time in the old fierce
 days the councillors and chief argued and defied one another for
 weeks at a time over the question as to whether the white man
 was to be tolerated in the country, and it was the strong affection
 of old Mombera for Dr. Laws, and Wm. Koyi which alone held in the
 dogs of war, and prevented his councillors from going forth on an
 exterminating expedition. Yet in spite of the great power of the
 chief he lives as father of the people with all the villagers as his
 children. His house is like their own, built right in the centre of
 [567] the village. The poorest slave has access to him, and he hands his
 beer pot or his snuff to the meanest villager when he would
 show him friendliness.

[620] Under the paramount chief there are four great sub-chiefs, and
 [634] each of them has his councillors and headmen. Then these
 headmen have each a group of villages under their control. They
 [692] hear and dispose of petty quarrels between the villagers. Cases
 in which headmen are involved go to the sub-chief, and cases in
 which the sub-chiefs are involved, and all great tribal affairs,
 go to the paramount chief. The tribal council is an impressive
 645 sight. Just before I came here I had the privilege of being present
 in one of these great gatherings of the tribe. It had met to discuss
 the advisability of coming under the British Protectorate. The
 great chief, Chimtunga, had sent out his messengers to call to
 council all the sub-chiefs and headmen. They marched into the

[634] chief's kraal on the appointed day, each sub-chief followed by his
 councillors and hundreds of armed warriors, all walking in single
 file, and dressed in their gaudiest clothes. They sat round the
 kraal till thousands were present. By-and-bye the paramount
 [643] chief walked in, followed by his brothers and council. He was
 greeted by a roar of salutation, and took his seat. When the case
 was opened, and the subject introduced, the fathers of the people
 rose one after the other and saluted the chief, and then addressed
 the people. The speakers walked up and down, speaking with

• [537] considerable incisiveness and eloquence, their language full of
 metaphors and traditional allusions. Then the chief spoke,
 closing the discussion. Immediately it was ended and the royal
 [635] salutation given, a warrior leapt into the circle with a war cry, fell

borne out in Roman days also, that the handier, and more artful and skilful people have usually a lower social morality than the fighting races. Our Ngoni came to Nyasaland as a moral blessing. The ordinary obscenity of the indigenous people was not for a moment tolerated among the Ngoni. It is very appalling to hear and see how degraded were the Tumbuka into whose land they came. A people among whom virginity was unknown, where family relationship was no defence, where men and women lived in an atmosphere that was charged with vice. But when the Ngoni came, many of the foul practices of the Tumbuka were punished with death. Their obscene dances were prohibited, many of their superstitious customs were banned, and generally a higher type of morality was superimposed.

The aristocratic Ngoni is a gentleman through and through. His word is absolute. When he gives a promise you may fearlessly rely on it. He does not steal, nor does he intrude on your privacy. I have heard the old men storm in a village because some boys stood around staring at me, or speaking. Before a superior they should sit down, and remain silent, or only speak in whispers. When they address you they always give you your family name of honour, or if they don't know it, round off each sentence with a "sire." When you come into a village you sit at the gate of the cattle kraal and wait for your reception. After a long time the elders of the village appear. Their courtesy is that the longer the wait the greater the welcome. For if they come out quickly they seem to say you had better clear out quickly. When they appear they sit down at some distance, and remain silent. You must not speak till you are spoken to. After a decent interval, they come forward, sit down, and leisurely say, "We see you, sire." Then you reply, "Yes, sire." That is the whole courtesy. Conversation may now begin. When you would rise to go, you first of all say, "Remain in peace, sire," and they reply, "Yes, and go thou in peace, sire." It is very courteous and friendly, and they accompany you along the path a little way, and again send you off with salutation.

Their village life is not without interests and amusements. During the day in the head villages there are continual trials in open court—trials which last for hours and days with continual speech-making. In the evenings the kraal echoes with the chorus of village dances. Quite the prettiest and most delightful dance is the village competitive dance which is held during the day. A